



Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

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Issue 76

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Today's readings

Psalm 118: 1–9

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures for ever!

Let Israel say, 'His steadfast love endures for ever.'

Let the house of Aaron say, 'His steadfast love endures for ever.'

Let those who fear the Lord say, 'His steadfast love endures for ever.'

Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place.

With the Lord on my side I do not fear. What can mortals do to me?

The Lord is on my side to help me; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.

It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put confidence in mortals.

It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put confidence in princes. Amen. *(NRSV)*

Luke 12: 32–30 (“Do not be afraid”)

‘Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

‘Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

‘But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.’ *(NRSV)*

Today's hymns

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| 1 | <i>For everyone born</i> (CH:685) | 2 | <i>Give me joy in my heart</i> (SP:223) |
| | 3 | <i>Christ's is the world in which we move</i> (CH:724) | |
| 4 | <i>Fairest Lord Jesus</i> (CH:463) | 5 | <i>Tell out, my soul</i> (CH:286) |

In the Name of the Father and of

Several years ago I enjoyed – if “enjoyed” be the right word – a strange experience at the Royal Highland Show. I was there on duty at the Church of Scotland stall, ready to tell anyone who might come my way all about our denomination’s HIV Programme. During my coffee break I went for a wander, hoping to pat a Clydesdale horse or perhaps admire a big red tractor. But these plans were not to come to fruition because just a few steps from where I had been setting out my stall I was approached by a nervous-looking civil servant with a iPad who asked if I might possibly be free to go into a nearby building and be part of the audience for a talk by the Secretary of State for Scotland. How could I decline a nervous civil servant in his hour of need? So in I went and found myself one of an audience of perhaps seven people. (And given the small numbers, I might even have been the only actual member of the public – who knows?)

Anyway, the event got under way, featuring a chairperson, plus an electricity industry Chief Exec, then, of course, the Secretary of State. All through the two presentations the big theme was just how great it was that the people of Scotland had so much cheap and dependable electricity for cooking meals, boiling kettles, powering devices, and so on – a predictable message, some might say. But something was nagging away in my mind, so when the chair called for questions I jumped in quick, posing a question along these lines: “Robin Hill, Church of Scotland. You’ve emphasized just how plentiful and how inexpensive electricity can be in our country. But surely in age of global warming we need to be conserving energy, rather than using it cheaply.”

Oh my! How quickly a business executive and a Cabinet minister can change there tune. The answer given ran something like this: “Robin makes a *very* good point there. And yes, we are most definitely taking energy conservation extremely seriously, *of course!*”

Of course.

I need hardly tell you that in the decade or so since my unexpected brush with the great and the good, the issue of energy conservation has grown in importance, as the burning of fossil fuels has been linked first to global warming, and then on to other questions covering the world’s ecology, human need and even global security. The cars that we drive, the coal that we burn, the food that we eat, the holidays that we take: all of these are determined and controlled by human beings ... by *us*.

Today in church we are marking “Climate Change Sunday”, when congregations across the country are being asked to reflect upon the direction of travel which our planet is taking, with us – perhaps too literally – in the driving seat. This is an opportunity for us to pause and look at what it is that we are doing to God’s beautiful planet Earth. And this opportunity is one which we should be keen to take up, because there is just so much at stake here. In our homes, in our work, in our church, we are all consumers of such a great deal of precious resources, but just like that chief exec and that Cabinet minister, our minds could certainly do with focusing a bit less on this being a time of affordable plenty, and a whole lot more on this being a time of deepest crisis.

In just a few weeks’ time, the world’s leaders will come to the fine and beautiful city of Glasgow: for generations a major hub of coal and steel and hard, manual labour. Clydeside is famed for ship-building and other forms of heavy engineering which together made the Glasgow of my early childhood a place of grim pollution with black-walled tenements and soot-stained washing lines. Now the city is cleaner, but its environmental issues remain.

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

What will the big names of COP26 make of Glasgow? And what will they make of the world's future chances of averting climate catastrophe? Only time will tell. But while those big names – President Biden, Pope Francis, David Attenborough and more – will have their say on the world's stage, what about us? What might *we* say about the way in which our world has become a place where wasteful living seems to be worshipped, where precious resources are poured out to satisfy the convenience of wealthy folk ... like *us*?

Augustine of Hippo was a 4th century theologian who wrote a book entitled, *City of God*. In this text he looked at the way in which Rome had got its values all wrong as the people idolized power and glory, military might and a hierarchy of personal prestige in which some were rulers leading a life of opulence, while others were slaves “owned” by often cruel masters. As the title of Augustine's book suggests, however, there is *another* city whose values pour scorn on Rome: the City of God, which upholds selfless love and kindness, lived out after the pattern of Jesus. This alternative “city” is countercultural, bucking the trend in declaring that there is another way – a *better*, more holy way of living.

So what would it mean for us turn our backs on the selfish values of our own personal 21st century Rome and set out on a quest for this fabled City of God? What would we need to take with us for such a journey into the unknown? First and foremost we would need to set off filled from head to foot with trust. And our trust would need to be in the presence of God and in the values of Jesus. Not for nothing was the Christian faith first known as “The Way”. This new religion represented a move away, a heading out and off from the old assumptions, to take in the view of new and quite unexpected horizons.

If we allow ourselves to see what humanity has done over the last couple of centuries, plundering the earth, polluting the land, the sea, the sky, then we must feel some impetus towards making this environment of ours – this living space – a place of sustainability for future generations, those of our children and grandchildren, and even further beyond. But then, maybe we feel our resolve shaking and wobbling, as we start to lose our nerve:

- ◆ What if we don't like living in a new and better way? (Trust in God.)
- ◆ What if people laugh at us for choosing to have a simpler lifestyle? (Trust in God.)
- ◆ What if friends look down on us for trying to live as we should? (Trust in God.)

The worship materials for Climate Change Sunday contain a passage which I found very powerful. Here is its message: a message to us, today:

We must learn to trust God ... The gospel invites us to embrace God's way and live generously, trusting that we can enter into a family of brothers and sisters in Christ who know who they are and what they are about and will express their ties to you and meet your needs in love and kindness and basic social solidarity. Trust giving birth to trust and generosity to generosity. Frankly this is not rocket science – this is how Christian brothers and sisters have lived together in the past. ... Our God is a loving and generous God and he longs for us to embrace the way of generosity too.

As Jesus famously instructed his followers, he also instructs us in our uncertain times: *Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* Amen.

Praying for others

A prayer on Climate Change Sunday from Christian Aid:

God of all creation,
we come longing to meet with you,
to be refreshed and restored by the spring of living water,
by the source of all life.

From the tree of the garden of Eden,
to the tree in the city in Revelation,
we thank you for your vision of creation healed.
Help us to be your agents of restoration,
tending to the beauty of the Earth,
and enabling your healing of the nations.

We pray for transformation of hearts and minds,
for the stones of indifference to become hearts of compassion,
for the stones of anxiety to become hearts of hope.

Spirit of God who hovered over the waters,
harness your power in us to live faithfully and
in harmony with the rhythms of righteousness,
for the restoration of creation and the glory of your Name. Amen.

And finally . . .

Abigail Morrison considers audience participation post-pandemic:

Recently I have been asking elders for their views on what is discouraging people from coming out to Church, and what folk enjoy about the Zoom services. (By the way, if you have any views on this, please feel free to share them with me.) But it got me thinking about the ways in which the pandemic has changed the world, perhaps for ever.

Our churches have embraced services using Zoom. Many members positively enjoy those services. You get to join Church in the comfort of your own home. You don't need to get dressed in your Sunday best. You get to chat to folk in the break-out rooms after the service and often end up talking to people you may not have in the halls on a Sunday. There are a lot of good things about the Zoom services.

Similarly, many arts organisations are now embracing online delivery as a way of reaching audiences. I have just renewed my subscription to the RSNO. They are now running a digital season alongside their Usher Hall one. The digital concerts reach people who could not realistically attend a live concert in Edinburgh. It's not the same as a live concert but it has allowed the orchestra to reach out to new audiences across the globe.

My daughter works for the British Museum. Like other museums and galleries, they found a new audience for exhibitions online. In fact, you often get guided round by the curator, which is fascinating.

All these institutions – churches, theatres, orchestras, museums and galleries – want to welcome people back in the flesh. They can't survive without that. But they have also found a new way of reaching people, a way that brings the world closer together.

I suspect these new ways of touching people are here to stay.